

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## The Finger of God: The Judgment of God

Like many others, it was part of my early education to be told by my mother, "Don't point! It's rude!" I knew what she meant, of course. To have a finger pointed at you makes you feel vaguely uncomfortable. You are being put on the spot. The impression is being given that you are being identified as having done something wrong. Your attention is being drawn to things you don't want to be reminded of. This is certainly the way in which the figure of a finger is often used in the Bible. And, of course, it is much more significant when it is God Who is pointing the finger of accusation against you.

God knows us through and through, and notices, and records, all we do. He is a righteous God. On the positive side, "God is just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). On the other hand, Jude 14-15 tell us, "The Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

God will hold us to account for every word we have uttered, even those words spoken in haste or in jest. This teaches us important principles. Don't mock God. Don't belittle Him. Don't denigrate Him or disparage Him. "Thou shalt not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

Let us look at a few examples in Scripture and see what is involved.

The early chapters of Exodus record the details of Pharaoh, through his so-called magicians, contesting with Moses, the leader of God's earthly people Israel. More exactly, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was contesting with God via Moses.

### Exodus 8:16-19: Magicians to Pharaoh

Let us read the record in Exodus 8:16-19. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast. Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said."

Notice the reference to the finger. Who was being put on the spot? Against whom was an accusation being made? The issue is clear. By claiming to be able to do the same as God, the magicians were not only claiming to be equal with God. They were, in reality, bringing God down to their level, saying that He was no more powerful than they were. They were, in effect, disparaging God, denigrating Him. God could not and would not allow this to occur. He used the tongues of the magicians themselves to identify and declare what was going on. "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19) It resulted in God's righteous judgment against Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt.

### Exodus 31:18: The Commandments of God.

Let us read Exodus 31:18. "And [God] gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."

The Law of Moses could never bring salvation. This is indicated in that it was written with the finger of God. It told the people of Israel where they were going wrong. It needed the grace of God to bring salvation, ultimately through the value to God of the blood of Christ. As is often said, "The Law accuses, Grace excuses". The only possible outcome of the application of the Law of God was righteous judgment at the hand of the all-righteous God.

### Leviticus 4: The sin offering

This principle is emphasised again and again in the details of the sin offering given in Leviticus 4:1-35. All the categories of the people were considered, one by one. The priests, the whole congregation as such, the rulers, the common people as individuals.

In every case we read that the blood of the sacrifice had to be applied on their behalf by the finger of the offering priest. How graphic an accusation that all and each were guilty before God and needed to shelter under the blood that had been shed on their behalf! A clear picture to us that *"the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, [and nothing else], [has the power to] cleanse us from [every kind of] sin"* (1 John 1:7). None can rightly accuse us of being any longer guilty before God, as is emphasised in Romans 8:3 and 33. *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: ... Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."*

In other words, 'Who can point the finger at us?' We are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son. He has righteously dealt with all our sins on the Cross. We are now completely clear of the judgment of God. Christ has done for us what we could never have done for ourselves.

### Daniel 3: Nebuchadnezzar's big mistake.

Let us now think about Nebuchadnezzar's big mistake in Daniel 3.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, set himself as an object to be worshipped by having an image of gold erected to represent him (Daniel 3:1-3). He issued a decree that all must worship the image (Daniel 3:4-5). Any who did not do so would be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace (Daniel 3:6). Three godly Jews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not willing to comply (Daniel 3:12), as this would be putting Nebuchadnezzar on the same level as God.

Indirectly this would assess God as being no more worthy of worship than Nebuchadnezzar, who was coerced by some of his staff to carry out the decree he himself had been persuaded to issue (Daniel 3:8-12). This he did, saying to the Jews, *"Who is the God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"* (Daniel 3:15). The three Jews firmly testified, *"Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy Gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up"* (Daniel 3:17-18).

The text goes on to confirm that their God did indeed deliver them (Daniel 3:19-26), and the judgment of God fell upon Nebuchadnezzar. That was the end result of Nebuchadnezzar refusing to worship the true God and setting up an image of himself as an object of worship in the place of God. What folly! Happily, Nebuchadnezzar later repented, saw the hand of God in it all and declared, *"There is no other God that can deliver after this sort"* (Daniel 3:29).

### Daniel 5

Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, did not learn the lesson available from his grandfather's example. We read in Daniel 5:1-4 that, when he succeeded to the throne, *"Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his [grand] father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone."*

What a travesty! Holy vessels which were made for the service of God in the Temple at Jerusalem, devoted to a pagan feast in a pagan land by a pagan king. But we must read on. *"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another"* (Daniel 5:5-6).

Belshazzar was terrified, but none of his astrologers or soothsayers or wise men could interpret the writing. Happily, the queen was able to recommend Daniel the prophet as being capable of interpreting the message (Daniel 5:1-12), and he proceeded to do so, as follows. *"And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck,*

*and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain” (Daniel 5:25-30)*

I say again, Belshazzar had not learned the lesson to which his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar had eventually paid heed. Belshazzar had insulted and denigrated the God of Israel, God’s earthly people, and was precipitately removed from the throne of Babylon, the most powerful empire on earth at the time. God could not and would not allow such blasphemous conduct.

The accusation, the plain declaration of Belshazzar’s sin and fate was written by the fingers of a man’s hand. The figure is entirely consistent with the other examples we have considered. As we read in Galatians 6:7, *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”*

Belshazzar took a step further downward than Nebuchadnezzar had. He treated the holy vessels from the temple as common (see Daniel 5:2-4), ordinary drinking vessels to praise the idol gods of his own pagan religion. In effect he was reducing the One True God to something less than the idols. So it is today. There seems to be a continual trend downgrading God in general and our Lord Jesus Christ in particular.

Similarly in Luke 11:14-20: *“And [Jesus] was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. ... And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.”*

To attribute to Satan what the Son of God had done was gross sin indeed. There is no doubt that, during the Lord’s public ministry, and within certain limits, Satan had been allowed to use men to counterfeit what the Son of God here demonstrated to be within His own personal power. Bringing the Lord down to the level of being a mere agent of Satan could not be allowed to be even suggested.

### **John 8:6: The woman taken in adultery**

For our last example, let us turn to John 8:1-11: *“Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”*

It is, and must be, significant, that the Lord Jesus is recorded as bowing down and writing on the ground. Illustratively, God has indeed stooped down twice and communicated a major message to all men, and, in particular, to the nation of Israel (see Exodus 31:18). The first time, the scripture is specific. He wrote with His finger upon the ground. He gave them the Law of Moses, at their insistence. They demanded a set of rules and regulations, and committed themselves in advance to keeping to it verbatim. And, of course, they failed, and miserably at that. The reference to His finger asserts that the Law brought not peace, but an accusation. Who then was under examination? Not so much the woman as those making the accusation against her! They were most ready to accuse her, but not by any means so ready to acknowledge their own inability to keep the Law of Moses.

The second time, no mention of a finger of accusation is made. God has now stooped down in grace in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, with a message of grace, that whosoever will may come to Him. John 3:16 says: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* And in John 6:37: *“him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”*

How glad we can be that God’s message to us now is not related to anything we ourselves can do. We are certainly included in the overall statement, *“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). But what we could not achieve for ourselves in God’s sight, has been done for us by the grace of God.

Unlike Pharaoh and his magicians, Belshazzar and his astrologers and wise men, and the religious leaders of the day when the Lord Jesus lived on earth, we Christians are under no delusion about who Jesus is. He is the Son of God,

the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. He came into the world to be the Saviour of the world, including you and me. If we truly believe that He died for our sins and rose again, we are cleared for ever from the righteous judgment of a holy God. We are ready for heaven while living on earth, and the Lord Jesus is coming soon to take us to be with Himself for all eternity.

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